

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 2509

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, EG
SUBJECT: POLITICAL CLIMATE ON CAIRO CAMPUSES

REF: CAIRO 2169

SUMMARY: UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATORS AT CAIRO AND AIN SHAMS
UNIVERSITIES ARE MUCH CALMER THAN ALEXANDRIA FACULTY (REFTEL).
MOST EXPECT UNIVERSITIES WILL OPEN FEB 12 AND WILL REMAIN
QUIET. STUDENT ACTIVISTS ARE FEW, BUT MANY ARE CONCERNED WITH
RISING GAP BETWEEN RICH AND POOR. EVEN THOSE PROFESSORS
WHO ARE SADAT SUPPORTERS WERE PLEASED THAT STUDENTS SPOKE
OUT FRANKLY TO HIM BUT WERE EMBARRASSED BY SPINELESS PER-
FORMANCE OF ADMINISTRATORS IN THEIR "DEBATE" WITH PRESIDENT.
THEY SAY THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT IKHWAN PARTICIPATED IN RIOTS
OR HAVE DECIDED WORK WITH LEFTIST ACTIVISTS. END SUMMARY

1. REFTTEL REPORTED ACTIVE DISCONTENT OF LARGE NUMBER ALEXANDRIA
UNIVERSITY FACULTY FOLLOWING SADAT'S MEETING FEB 1 WITH ALL
UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERS. IN LAST FEW DAYS, PAO
HAS HAD OPPORTUNITY TEST POLITICAL CLIMATE AT CAIRO CAMPUSES
IN CONVERSATIONS WITH TOP UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATORS. A
DIGEST OF THEIR VIEWS FOLLOWS:

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(A) UNIVERSITY OPENING. UNIVERSITIES ARE EXPECTED OPEN
AS SCHEDULED FEB 12, THOUGH LAST MINUTE GOE DECISION TO DELAY
IS STILL POSSIBLE. CAIRO UNIVERSITY VP THOUGHT TROUBLE MIGHT
BE POSSIBLE IN FIRST FEW DAYS AS ACTIVISTS PROTEST CONTINUED
DETENTION OF STUDENTS WHO PARTICIPATED IN JANUARY RIOTS. OTHERS,
HOWEVER, EXPECT RELATIVE CALM.
(B) REASONS FOR STUDENT DISCONTENT. SEVERAL INTERLOCUTORS

INTRODUCED CONCEPT OF RISING CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS AS CONTRIBUTOR TO RIOTS, WHICH ALL THOUGHT WERE SPONTANEOUS. ENVY, BOTH OF RICH EGYPTIANS AND OF RICH PENINSULAR ARABS WHO "FLAUNT THEIR WEALTH", PROVIDES FERTILE GROUND FOR MARXISTS AND OTHER FOREIGN IDEOLOGIES. CONSCIOUSNESS IS CONSEQUENTLY INCREASING ON TWO LEVELS, BOTH FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC, AND THERE IS RISE IN SENSE OF SYMPATHY FOR POOR AGAINST THE RICH.

AN AIN SHAMS DEAN ASCRIBED RIOTING TO GOE'S POLITICALLY INEPT HANDLING OF PRICE RISES. A CAIRO UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR OFFERED A MORE SOPHISTICATED ANALYSIS, STRESSING THAT ECONOMICS, NOT POLITICS, WERE ROOT CAUSE OF DISTURBANCES. PRICE OF LABORER'S MORNING TEA AND BREAD WENT UP BECAUSE OF FINO FLOUR AND BUTAGAS PRICE HIKES. WITH PRICE CUT BACK, UNHAPPINESS DISSIPATED, AND GOE CONSEQUENTLY MAKING TROUBLE FOR ITSELF BY OVEREMPHASIS ON POLITICAL EXPLOITATION OF RIOTING BY A TINY MINORITY. SAME PROFESSOR THOUGHT CLOSURE OF SOME HIGH SCHOOLS TODAY (REFERENDUM DAY) WAS UNNECESSARY PRECAUTION.

(C) AFFILIATION OF STUDENT ACTIVISTS. VAST MAJORITY OF STUDENTS ARE APATHETIC. DEAN OF ARTS AT CAIRO UNIVERSITY THOUGHT ACTIVISTS NUMBERED NO MORE THAN 5 PERCENT. ANOTHER PROFESSOR SUGGESTED THAT OF ENTIRE CAIRO UNIVERSITY POPULATION, 10 PERCENT ARE ACTIVE LEFTISTS, 10 PERCENT ACTIVE RELIGIOUS RIGHTISTS, 40 PERCENT APATHETIC ABOUT STUDIES AND POLITICS AND 40 PERCENT APATHETIC POLITICALLY BUT EAGER TO DO WELL ACADEMICALLY. AIN SHAMS DEAN SAID EDUCATION FACULTY HAS ONLY FIVE COMMUNISTS AND ALL WERE ARRESTED. THE THREE POLITICAL TRENDS ON CAMPUS ARE LEFT, RELIGIOUS RIGHT AND NASSERIST. NASSERIST STRONGHOLD IS AIN SHAMS WHILE IKHWAN IS MOST POPULAR AND NUMEROUS AT CAIRO UNIVERSITY (COMMENT: CONFIDENTIAL

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AN AIN SHAMS DEAN PROVIDED FIRST REASONABLE EXPLANATION WE HAVE HEARD FOR THIS WELL-KNOWN PHENOMENON. HE SUGGESTED POLITICAL FORCES OUTSIDE UNIVERSITY HAVE DELIBERATELY CONCENTRATED THEIR ATTENTION ON SPECIFIC UNIVERSITIES AND FACULTIES.)

(D) SADAT'S DEBATE WITH STUDENTS. ALL ADMINISTRATORS THOUGHT THIS BY FAR MOST INTERESTING OF SADAT'S RECENT PUBLIC APPEARANCES. ONE DEAN NOTED THAT SADAT WILL NOW UNDERSTAND DIFFICULTY FACED BY UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATORS IN CONTROLLING POLITICALLY ACTIVE STUDENTS. OTHERS STRESSED THAT MANY POINTS RAISED BY STUDENTS, PARTICULARLY INFERENCE THAT SAYYID MAR'I IS CORRUPT, ARE SHARED BY FACULTY MEMBERS. MOST SAID THEY WERE PROUD STUDENTS HAD COURAGE TO SPEAK UP. (COMMENT: ESTABLISHMENT HAS LONG FEARED SADAT SO CUT OFF FROM EVERY DAY LIFE THAT HE REALLY DID NOT UNDERSTAND POPULAR ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CONCERNS. HENCE MANY WHO DISAGREED WITH OPPOSITIONIST STUDENTS' REMARKS WERE STILL "PROUD" THEY SPOKE OUT.) STUDENTS WHO SPOKE OUT HAVE BECOME CAMPUS HEROS. ONE PROFESSOR NOTED THAT NASSERIST STUDENT HAD MADE LASTING IMPRESSION BY QUIETLY ASKING SADAT WHAT IDEOLOGY HE ADVOCATES.

(COMMENT: MODERATE STUDENTS HAVE WORRIED ABOUT THIS QUESTION FOR MONTHS, COMPLAINING MARXISM, NASSERISM AND CAPITALISM ARE NOT ACCEPTABLE TO REGIME, BUT THAT SADAT HAS NOT OFFERED AN ARTICULATE ALTERNATIVE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY.) AS LONG AS STUDENTS SPEAK UP SENSIBLY AND COURAGEOUSLY, SOME NOTED, SUCH FRANK PUBLIC DEBATES ARE USEFUL. DANGER IS FROM FANATIC, NARROW MINDED IKHWAN FANATICS.

(E) SADAT'S DEBATE WITH UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATORS. ALL SENIOR INTERLOCUTORS WERE EMBARRASSED BY SUPINE POSITION OF THEIR RECTORS. SEVERAL, HOWEVER, POINTED OUT FRANKLY THAT TO HAVE ARGUED WOULD HAVE BEEN TO INVITE DISMISSAL.

(F) UNIVERSITY INDEPENDENCE. GOE IS UNLIKELY RESTRICT UNIVERSITY ACTIVITIES UNLESS VIOLENCE IS INTRODUCED. A KEY PROBLEM IS TO DEAL WITH NON-STUDENTS WHO COME ON TO CAMPUS TO AGITATE. LEGITIMATE STUDENT DISCUSSIONS WILL CONTINUE BUT MAY HAVE TO OCCUR INSIDE STUDENT UNION. (COMMENT: IT MAY BE THAT EXISTING POLITICAL CLUBS, SUCH AS NASSERIST THOUGHT

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CLUB, WILL BE ALLOWED CONTINUE.) PROFESSORS CLAIM THEY CAN EASILY DISTINGUISH BETWEEN STUDENTS, HOWEVER UNINFORMED, AIRING THEIR OWN OPINIONS (WHICH WILL BE ALLOWED) AND STUDENTS WHO ARE MOUTHPIECES OF PROVOCATIVE FOREIGN IDEOLOGIES.

(G) LEFT/RIGHT COALITION. THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT IKHWAN LEFTISTS HAVE ESTABLISHED ANY TACTICAL TRUCE (COMMENT: THE NIGHTMARE OF THE EGYPTIAN SECURITY SERVICES). ONE AIN SHAMS PROFESSOR SAID NASSERISTS, LEFTISTS AND SOME IKHWAN FROM ENGINEERING FACULTY WERE FIGHTING EACH OTHER ON CAMPUS JAN 18. CAIRO UNIVERSITY DEAN BELIEVES THERE WAS NO IKHWAN PARTICIPATION IN RIOTS AND THAT IKHWAN DID NOT WANT ASSOCIATE THEMSELVES WITH LEFTIST AGITATORS: TIME IS NOT RIGHT AND THE "ISSUE" WAS INAPPROPRIATE.

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